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ABSTRACT

This is a condensation of several studies which sought to ascertain how communities can, do, or could utilize cable television (educational--ETV--and community) in Alberta. Data was gathered on a wide variety of sources (e.g., cable operators, community groups, educational groups, government, general public) from questionnaires, program evaluations, and published reports. Results indicate: (1) educational institutions and the community are largely unaware of the potential of cable television; (2) most participants in ETV or community programing were post-secondary school educators; (3) educators showed equal interest in community channels, while community groups prefer the community channels; (4) favorite viewing hours were 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.; (5) program categories of the greatest interest are education, public affairs, recreation/health, and dramatic arts; (6) interest in and quality of ETV rates higher than that of commercial programing, while interest but not quality of community cable rates higher than that of commercial programing. Recommendations are made for each source from which data were collected. (DAG)

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ALBERTA CABLE STUDIES

A Condensation of a Report

prepared for

Alberta Education

by Dr. Robert E. Miller

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WE SHARE YOU SHARE

Introduction

This is a report about sharing and communicating when your neighbours number 20,000 strong or 100,000 or even only 10,000 - too many to invite to tea and even too many to crowd into a community hall.

What each member of that 10,000 or 100,000 does and thinks will have some effect upon your own personal life style. The actions of any one of the 10,000 might cause the park you walk your dog in to be cut in half to make way for a roadway; the street you live on could be barricaded to stop itinerant traffic; the neighbour kids, cats and dogs may cease to run loose on your streets. Your street may be one upon which you don't walk alone at night or one upon which you do. So you don't walk in the park, have no kids and are not a lover of pets! Like most of the 10,000, you just want to mind your own business and add to your coin collection. But, wouldn't you like to know about the fellow two blocks away who has a mint collection of Canadian coins dating back to . . .? That's the stuff of community and educational Cable TV. Roadways, kids, coin collections, college courses, and cross country skiing. Not the sort of thing that makes TV networks check ratings but the sort of thing that might make living in your particular community more agreeable. To quote the Canadian Radio and Television

Commission (CRTC) Citizen Access Cable TV provides an opportunity to "enrich community life by fostering communication among individuals and community groups".

The announcement from which the quotation was taken was made in May of 1969. What has happened since then is not very much.

There are some pockets of activity, largely school or institutionally based, at various points in Canada. Some local cable operators have attempted to involve the community but usually have done so during the initial stages of the cable service. Some have succumbed to the business of profit making and nominal fulfilling of CRTC obligations.

The utilization of the educational channel in Alberta is embryonic but growing. The consortia are institutionally based, generally short on funds and long on program hours which can be filled.

The viewing population appears to be unaware of the potential for communication through the designated cable channels (ETV and Community) and largely ignorant of the licensing requirements of the cable carriers to further the use of the community channel or the fact that the use of the ETV channel has been regulated in such a way that the provincial authority bears the major responsibility for its use.

The Research Projects

What follows is a condensation of information gained in several studies including I. A Leadership Survey, II. A Needs and Uses Survey and III. A Model Development Project.

The intent of the studies was to ascertain how communities can, are, or could utilize a hitherto largely untapped medium of communications: a medium that has a potential effect upon the quality of life within the community and yet one which seems to have eluded that purpose thus far. There is evidence of some utilization of the educational channels which, because of CRTC regulatory status, are left largely to the provincial authorities to develop. The community channel, on the other hand, is left largely in the hands of the local operator under conditions also defined by CRTC. Educational television, it should be noted, is undertaken specifically for local cable distribution by the diverse educational institutions and their consortia.

The thrust of this study which has taken more than one year to complete was intended to be somewhat developmental and informational, but most important it is a study which has been fact finding.

ACCESS

ACCESS (the popular name for the Alberta Educational Communications Corporation) operates independently of government but under guidelines developed by an Advisory Committee to the AECA (Alberta Educational Communications Authority). ACCESS has opted to give up any direct involvement in Cable distribution in favour of open air broadcasting and other means of reaching the public. Despite its corporate attitude, ACCESS is willing to supply program materials to ETV consortia for re-broadcast over the various cable systems. However, its educational clients (school systems and institutions) as determined by the research evidence, clearly expect more in way of services and assistance. Indeed, post secondary institutions in particular look to ACCESS for direct production assistance in the preparation of local cable ETV productions. At the present time ACCESS does not engage in such activity although it continues to solicit projects from local institutions for broadcast as well as media-based projects that may have some province-wide relevance. Three questions posed by one of the surveys are relevant here.

#12. Who do you think should be responsible for helping your particular groups of people produce television materials? ACCESS was the first choice of post secondary institutions, second choice of schools and last choice of communities.

#19. 62.3% of respondents selected the evening time period 7:30 - 9:00 pm as the first choice of times for watching televised programs.

#20. 50.6% of viewers indicated a preference for weekly programming and another 32.4% favored occasional viewing of TV.

Alberta Government and its Agencies

While the research evidence does not support the notion of direct government operation of the community or educational cable TV channels, it is clear that departments, agencies and corporations (namely the Departments of Education, AECA and ACCESS) are expected to assist in some real way. The information gathered through the two surveys, as well as the work done in connection with the Model Development Project, leaves little doubt that some assistance is expected by citizens in one form or another, from schools, post secondary institutions, ETV Consortia, and ACCESS.

Ways in which government agencies can be most effective fall largely in the support areas. These may possibly consist of giving some financial aid but more appropriately providing expert assistance to community and educational groups from already existing agencies like ACCESS and groups such as school or college-based media centres.

Cable Operators

Cable operators under the broadcast regulations have an obligation to promote and fund some form of citizen activity over the designated community channels. (Most often the alloted channel is channel 10). To whatever degree that this has been done, local citizenry remain generally unaware of it. In two recently completed studies on Cable TV in Alberta the cable companies were shown to rank only third as a source of information about the operation of the two channels (ETV and Community). It is known that cable companies, last year, were reported to have shown greater profits than the open channel broadcasters, that ownership is usually somewhat removed from the community in which it operates, and that the type of equipment and studio facility offered for community use is, in the opinion of many potential users, often dated and inadequate for the purposes as envisioned by the CRTC.

Survey Responses of Particular Relevance to Cable Operators.

2. As a Cable subscriber would you say that the quality of picture reception on the community and the educational Cable TV Channels both are:

	COMMUNITY	EDUCATIONAL
Excellent	5.9%	5.7%
Good	37.8	47.8
Fair	37.3	31.0
Poor	15.7	7.5
Undecided	3.2	8.0

3. As a Cable TV subscriber would you say that the quality of the picture on regular commercial Cable TV channels (ie. CBC, CTV and the like) is:	Excellent	23.6%
	Good	54.5
	Fair	18.3
	Poor	2.6
	Undecided	1.0

5. Would you say that you are <u>not</u> a Cable TV subscriber for reasons related to:

Quality of picture reception	2.1%
Quality of programming	9.2
Cost of cabling	19.7
Little interest in TV	31.2
Other reasons	27.7
Quality/Cost	10.6

25. Would you say that Cable TV (Community and ETV) ought to be of the same calibre as local (Non-Network) TV productions?

Yes 68.5% No 31.5%

<u>Source of Knowledge About Community and ETV Channels</u>

Two other questions sought to discover the survey populations source of information regarding Cable TV. There was a discrepancy in what was expected of the cable operators and what appeared to have transpired. 50.2% of respondents expected to be informed about Cable TV by the operators, 21.4% cited the cable operator alone, 24.7% cited both cable operator and local news media, 4.9% cited cable operator and local government sources. Only 17.2% of respondents indicated that the cable operator was the actual source of information.

Community Groups

Community groups are, for the most part, not yet oriented towards the possibilities of intra and inter-group communication through the medium of cable television. They are generally unaware of its potential and the responsibility of cable operators. Nor are they familiar with the Canadian Radio and Television Commission provisions for Citizen Access Cable TV.

Nevertheless these same groups do have an awakening interest and willingness to explore the matter as witnessed by their responses to these survey questions.

11. Would you be interested in having your organization use cable TV as a means of communicating with itself or others:	Very interested	22.5%
	Interested	30.6
	Somewhat int.	27.5
	Not interested	19.4
15. To your knowledge are members of your group or organization participating now in either community or educational Cable TV?	Yes	17.3%
	No	82.7
17. Would you say the major reason your group or organization has not utilized cable TV is:	Unaware that it was possible to do so	34.8%
	No one in group knows how to do TV	12.0
	No funds available	21.7
	No time	6.5
	Not interested	15.2
	Funds/Time	9.8

19. What would be the most convenient time for you to watch community or ETV telecasts?

Early Morning	6:00 to 8:00 a.m.	1.6%
Morning	9:00 to 12:00 a.m.	8.5
Afternoon	1:00 to 4:00 p.m.	7.9
Evening	7:30 to 9:00 p.m.	62.3
Other		19.8

20. On what basis do you think you would most likely wish to view community or ETV telecasts?

Daily	11.1%
Weekly	50.6
Monthly	5.9
Occasional	32.4

21. If asked to do so would you personally assist in community or ETV programming? (If Yes check appropriate responses)

	Community	ETV
Performer	6.9%	7.3%
Resource person	55.3	60.6
Writer	3.1	3.6
Producer	3.1	1.5
Camera or technical operator	5.7	5.8
More than one activity	25.8	21.2

22. If they were available would you expect to use any of these special applications of Cable TV? (Check as many as applicable)

In order as ranked by respondents

1. Professional information exchange
2. Take courses for credit towards a diploma or degree
3. Shopping for groceries and the like via a TV price and merchandise display.
4. Do routine banking and bill paying
5. Use two way TV for meetings
6. Pay TV for special subscribers of non-broadcast materials

The ETV Consortia

The ETV Consortia utilizing the alloted ETV channels are typically in either an embryonic stage or experiencing organizational and technically related problems. The Calgary consortium, CETC, is currently operating on a regularly scheduled basis. The other consortia, while having at times sponsored on-going programming, have found it difficult to sustain regular televisicn program schedules. And, little programming by any of the consortia is locally produced. A heavy reliance has been placed on outside agencies, ACCESS and film sources. The status of the consortia during the period of the study is stated briefly as follows.

RED DEER - Although Red Deer has a long-standing history of using cable no telecasts were made during the survey period October 1975 to June 30, 1976.

Consortium RETA.

LETHBRIDGE - Began operation in the spring of 1976. Telecast period April to June 1976.

Consortium LETC.

CALGARY - Began telecasting in the fall of 1975. Telecast period November 1975 to February 1976.

Consortium CETC.

EDMONTON - Began telecasting in the fall of 1975. Telecast period October 1975 to June 1976.

Consortium EECC.

GRANDE PRAIRIE - No Consortium operating.

MEDICINE HAT - No Consortium operating.

Survey Questions Relevant to Consortia

19. What would be the most convenient time for you to watch community or ETV telecasts?

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Writer	3.1	3.6
Producer	3.1	1.5
Camera or technical operator	5.7	5.8
More than one	25.8	21.2

9. Who would you say should inform the public of ETV programming?

2.3% of respondents said that the ETV Consortium should.

12. Who would you think should be responsible for helping your particular group of people produce television materials?

17.5% of respondents answered "Educational TV Consortium".

23. Who do you think should provide leadership in the use of Citizen Access Cable TV?

School	5.6%
College	4.3
University	10.3
Tech. Inst.	2.3
Cable Co.	20.3
Community	20.6
Educ./Cable	10.0
Comm./Cable	8.0
All three*	18.6

* Educational Institutions, Cable Companies, Community

How would you rate the Community and ETV programs you have seen on Cable TV against local commercial programming in your area?

Overall technical quality as

	Community	ETV
Good	37.3%	45.9%
Better	10.0	16.9
Poorer	52.0	37.2

Interest value as

	Community	ETV
Good	44.7%	45.5%
Better	16.0	21.6
Poorer	39.3	33.0

Cable TV Program Interests From All Five Cities

Each viewer chose five subject categories that interested him or her most from a selection of fifteen. The fifteen categories were first derived from thirty categories each based upon the Dewey Decimal Classification system. The categories are listed as follows in the order of preference.

Rank

1. Education (Credit and Non Credit)
2. Public Affairs
3. Recreation, Health and Hobbies
4. Dramatic Arts and Entertainment
5. Sports
6. City Council and City Issues
7. Cultural and Ethnic
8. Law Interpretation
9. Community Calendar
10. School Board Coverage and Meetings
11. Safety Programs
12. Social Services (Agencies, Clubs)
13. Domestic Arts and Homemaking
14. Religion
15. Family Counselling

Post Secondary Institutes and Schools

Schools, by virtue of the scope and nature of their operations, tend to be consumers of cable ETV rather than producers of it. Teachers as a group are generally more aware of the ETV potentials than are their counterparts in post secondary institutions, and have had more experience in its utilization and possibly even in its production because of the numbers of small format ETV systems available for in-school use. These are, for the most part used internally as teaching tools and not for transmission over cable or open channel systems. Professional members of the post secondary institutions on the other hand are less frequent subscribers to Cable TV and do not appear to very often utilize cable (or open channel television) TV in their professional work.[1]

Rather interestingly, the post secondary institutions indicated more direct involvement in the actual production of television for Cable ETV than did schools. However this may be more a case of default on the part of schools rather than evidence of any great activity by the institutions. Such evidence in this regard as is available tended to come from the "Leadership Survey" part of the Cable TV Studies and to some extent from the mailed questionnaire sent out to a much larger group. Moreover, it would be fair to say that the institutional leaders would be speaking more to the work of the consortia representing the institutions rather than to the activities of its individual members.

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1. While the study itself did not concern itself directly with this matter it is known that schools, through Alberta School Broadcasts and ACCESS for the most part, regularly utilize ETV for in-class use. The institutions, generally speaking, tend not to utilize telecasts from outside sources.

RED DEER

1. Public affairs
2. Education
3. Rec, hobby
3. Cultural, Ethnic
4. Dramatic art
5. Calendar
6. Civic
7. Law
8. Sports, games
9. Safety
10. Domestic art
11. School board
11. Religion
12. Social services
12. Family

LETHBRIDGE

1. Civic
1. Education
2. Public affairs
3. Dramatic art
4. Sports, games
5. Rec, hobby
6. Cultural, ethnic
7. Calendar
8. Law
8. Religion
9. Domestic art
9. Social services
10. School board
10. Family

CALGARY

1. Public affairs
2. Education
3. Rec, hobby
4. Civic
5. Sports, games
6. Dramatic art
7. Law
8. Cultural, ethnic
9. School board
10. Calendar
11. Safety
12. Social services
13. Domestic art
14. Religion
15. Family

EDMONTON

1. Education
2. Public affairs
3. Rec, hobby
4. Sports, games
5. Dramatic art
6. Law
7. Cultural, ethnic
8. Civic
9. School board
10. Family
11. Safety
12. Religion
13. Social services
14. Calendar
15. Domestic art

GRANDE PRAIRIE

1. Education
2. Dramatic art
3. Cultural, ethnic
4. Sports, games
5. Rec, hobby
6. Civic
7. Calendar
8. Safety
9. Law
10. Domestic art
10. Social services
11. Family
11. Religion
12. School board

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND REGULATIONS

Glossary

ACCESS	Alberta Educational Communications Corporation
AECA	Alberta Educational Communications Authority
Cable Television	A system of transmitting signals over co-axial cable. The system is classed as closed circuit television.
Channel	A frequency band carrying a single signal of information.
Carrier	The means by which television programs are brought to cable TV subscribers or the agency providing the means.
Cable operator	The company controlling a Cable TV system.
Designated channel	A channel (as designated by the CRTC) reserved for a single user. eg. ETV Channel or the Community Channel
ETV.	Educational television having an institutional rather than a public or commercial base.

Regulations Governing Educational and Community Cable Channels

The following reflect some of the major points regarding cable programming and have been extrapolated from the published reports of the CRTC.

CRTC February 25, 1971
Published Statement of CRTC Prior to Public Hearing April 26, 1971
Montreal.

In its announcements of May 1969 and April 1970, the Commission referred to community programming on cable television, placing particular emphasis on the opportunity for licensees to:

> "enrich community life by fostering communication among individuals and community groups. In the development of programs of interest to the communities, it is the hope that cable television programmers will be motivated by innovation rather than imitation. Local programs should be based on access and freedom from the restraint of program schedules which are often less flexible in conventional broadcasting."

The encouragement given by the Commission to the principle of community programming has resulted in many interesting experiments. It is now possible to conclude that community programming is a practical possibility and that it has considerable potential for further development and refinement as part of the Canadian broadcasting system.

Excerpt: Policies Respecting Broadcasting Receiving Undertakings (Cable Television) December 15, 1975.

"Having in mind the objectives established for the community channel, the level of revenue generated by the cable television system, its size and maturity, and the diversity of the communities it serves, the Commission will expect licensees to allocate a reasonable percentage of their gross subscriber revenue

for the on-going operation of the community channel. While some of this amount will be required for facilities or hardware in connection with the channel, the Commission will expect the major portion to be spent on the variable cost of producing community programs.

Although the Commission has decided not to adopt for uniform application the 10% of gross subscriber revenue formula, it considers this a useful standard of expenditure for community programming. The profits and cash flow available to the licensee will be taken into consideration in judging the adequacy of the resources made available for community programming."

11. Subject to the conditions of its licence, no licensee shall distribute on its community channel

(a) any programming, other than community programming;
(b) any advertising material;
(c) any feature motion picture; or
(c) any signal or reproduction of any signal.

Educational Channel

1. The Canadian Radio-Television Commission is hereby directed that on or after the nineteenth day of March 1970, a licence to operate a broadcasting receiving undertaking may not be issued or renewed in respect of any such undertaking situated in a province where the provincial authority of the province has given notice in writing to the Commission that it desires that cable transmission facilities of that undertaking be reserved for the use of the provincial authority for the purpose of broadcasting, at times stipulated in the notice, the types of programming defined in Appendix A, and has satisfied the Commission that it has the present intention of using such facilities within a reasonable period of time, unless the Commission stipulated that at least one channel of the undertaking be reserved for the use of the provincial authority for that purpose.

2. In this direct "provincial authority" means a provincial authority as defined in Appendix A.

APPENDIX A

Definition for the Reservation of Educational Broadcasting Time and Facilities

Where, within its jurisdiction, the Canadian Radio-Television Commission, on the direction of the Governor in Council, stipulates

that at least one channel of a cable transmission facility be set aside for the use of a provincial authority for educational broadcasting or where the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation acts as agent of Her Majesty in right of Canada in providing a transmission facility for the use of a provincial authority for educational broadcasting, the time reserved on such channel or transmission facility for the provincial authority shall be used for broadcasting the following types of programming:

1. programming designed to be presented in such a context as to provide a continuity of learning opportunity aimed at the acquisition or improvement of knowledge or the enlargement of understanding of members of the audience to whom such programming is directed and under circumstances such that the acquisition or improvement of such knowledge or the enlargement of such understanding is subject to supervision or assessment by the provincial authority by any appropriate means;

2. programming providing information on the available courses or instruction or involving the broadcasting of special education events within the educational system.

Provincial authority: in relation to any province means such person, body or authority as may be designated by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council of that province as the provincial authority for that province for the purposes of this definition.

The intention of the above provision is to ensure that such programming, taken as a whole, shall be designed to furnish educational opportunities and shall be distinctly different from general broadcasting available on the public or private channels.

MODEL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (RED DEER)

Objectives

The major objective of this project was to develop a pattern of community communication through Cable TV that would foster intra-community relationships. It was expected that through this experience a workable model for other communities would evolve and that the Red Deer community itself would reap considerable benefit during the process. Red Deer was chosen because the time appeared to be ripe in that city.

Methodology

The project took the form of a school - community - cable co-operative effort: the school providing the major source of production talent; the community the source of programmed input; the cable company the transmission facility as well as a source of some technical assistance. The endeavor was supported through equipment and/or funding, public human resources cataloging, and audience surveying. A communications module was designed for high school students and included as part of a normal high school credit course. The designated course fit into the Language 21 program with the co-operation and assistance of Lindsay Thurber High School and Camille Lerouge Collegiate. The total project was fielded with the assistance and co-operation of RETA.

COMMUNITY TELE-COMMUNICATIONS LANGUAGE 21 UNIT

Objectives

The major objective of the instructional unit was to develop student production skills to the point where the students would be capable of producing telecasts for the community groups wishing to utilize either a cable community or a cable ETV channel. The students were expected to learn communication skills involving media that would be of personal lifetime benefit. That is to say, attention was paid in the unit plan to aspects of visual and audio literacy. The course did not expect to uniformly turn out persons who would necessarily become technical operators ie. camera operators or writers, but rather persons who had been exposed to these various technical aspects of communication who had learned some of the techniques involved, and who would arrive at some conclusions about their own skills and interests.

Methodology

The Language 21 unit lasting one trimester was taught on a co-operative teaching basis. The project director assumed the role of an outside expert with direct involvement in the teaching process. The classroom teacher, having less subject-matter knowledge and media experience more often assumed the role of evaluator and facilitator.

RED DEER HUMAN RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION PROJECT

Objectives

The first, and primary objective of this project, was to develop a catalog of current community human resources, such resources to be utilized by the radio and TV outlets in the Red Deer area as participants in educational and community service programming. A second objective was to give citizens of the area a chance to share their knowledge, experiences and expertise with a large number of people. The third objective, was to effect a co-operative liaison between the educational and media systems in the Red Deer area. A peripheral objective was to provide a novel and meaningful learning experience for a number of students.

Human Resources Catalog

A field co-ordinator and local team of interviewers were recruited. The field co-ordinator was a person who had prior experience in community relations and local survey work. Through the field co-ordinator local source material, lists and addresses of community groups were organized and compiled.

SUBJECT: Guns (681)

CONTACT PERSON: John Doe RES. Ph. # BUS. Ph. #

2nd LANGUAGE

DESCRIPTION: Collection of guns. Owns 200 guns. Sells guns, rifles shotguns, blackpowder guns; shells.

EXPERIENCE: 26 years in Business. Correspondence courses. Guns and keys. Instructor for hunters training courses.

AVAILABLE CONSULTANT: yes PERFORMER yes SUPPLIER yes

ASSISTANCE TO RED DEER COLLEGE: YES * NO RED DEER SCHOOLS:YES * NO

****

SUBJECT: Ice Sculpture (736)

CONTACT PERSON: Jane Doe RES. Ph.# BUS. Ph. #

2nd LANGUAGE Greek

DESCRIPTION: Carving ice and lard into animal and people shapes. Entering sculpture contests across Canada.

EXPERIENCE: 12 years in field. Four time gold medal winner at Regina Winter Fair. 6 gold medals in lard sculpture.

AVAILABLE CONSULTANT: yes PERFORMER maybe SUPPLIER Yes

ASSISTANCE TO RED DEER COLLEGE: YES * NO RED DEER SCHOOLS:YES * NO

****

SUBJECT: Crocheting (746)

CONTACT PERSON: Ms. Doe RES. Ph.# BUS. Ph. #

2nd LANGUAGE

DESCRIPTION: Different types of stitches to form different patterns. What wools are best to use. How to add patches or squares to each other to make quilts and afghans.

EXPERIENCE: 2 years.

AVAILABLE CONSULTANT: yes PERFORMER no SUPPLIER no

ASSISTANCE TO RED DEER COLLEGE: YES * NO RED DEER SCHOOLS:YES* NO

****

Red Deer Educational Television Association: RETA

At the core of RETA are a few agencies, mostly school, college and institutional, who have attempted to meet their own institutional needs while at the same time attempting to give some voice to the community at large. They have been hampered by organizational difficulties as well as inadequacies of the local cable operation, and by the limited membership of the group. A few rather dedicated persons have kept the RETA idea alive over the years.

After more than a year's involvement at the local level, the researcher is convinced that the factors which could facilitate Citizen Access Cable TV are: 1. The willingness of the cable company to provide well maintained, more up to date, and more flexible television production facilities of a standard consistent with a class A operation. 2. a revamped community based RETA organization with locally based financial support structure with the possibility of "seed" grants from government sources as well as some commitment by ACCESS to assist. 3. Designation and financial commitment of a local program facilitator from either the school systems or the Red Deer College. Indeed, Red Deer College, because of its philosophical commitment to serving local needs, might well expend more energies in this direction. 4. RETA should consider adopting a structural and financial base similar to the EECC proposal which specifies four interest groups in their overall scheme of things.

Four interest groups have a stake in educational TV:

A. Community Agencies - voluntary organizations, private schools, community schools, other public and separate schools, professional organizations, trades, consulates.

B. Adult Education Agencies - college, institutes of technology, continuing education departments, extension departments, vocational schools.

C. Pre-service and Inservice Education Agencies - university faculties, inservice education and professional departments, industries, commercial organizations.

D. Agencies interested in Daytime Educational Programming - school systems.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The conclusions that can be drawn from this research are that the major educational institutions and the community are largely unaware of the potentials and provisions for educational and Citizen Access Cable TV. There is some awareness of the existence of the CRTC Community Channel provisions but much less awareness of the CRTC ETV channel provisions. Fully one third of the community members and one quarter of the educators were not even aware of the fact that groups of citizens had access to the Cable ETV or Community Channels at all. What information is known to educators and community has come mainly from the local news media who appear to have done the best job of keeping the public informed of these matters. The cable companies themselves ranked no better than third as a general source of information about the Community Channels and the ETV Channels.

public awareness

Of those who were actually participants in either ETV or community programming, most were classified as educators although those who said they were participants accounted for slightly less than one third of the total sample population. Of those participating educators, more were from post-secondary institutions than there were from the schools. However, school respondents in general are more aware of the ETV Channels and the Community Channels, claim to make more use of cable television per se and are more often subscribers than non-cable TV subscribers than their counterparts in post-secondary institutions.

participation in educational and community programming

Of those who said that their group was not currently involved in cable TV programming the schools cited lack of funds as the major reason, post-secondary institution members cited unawareness, no interest and lack of funds about equally and in that order. Community groups of all kinds cited unawareness first, and second (and to a lesser degree) lack of funds as a reason for non-participation.

choice of channels

In the matter of which channel would most likely be used by educators or community, the educators chose both channels more often than they chose either the ETV Channel or the Community Channel. The community groups showed greatest interest in the Community Channel although there was little research evidence that they were actually involved in community programming.

hours of viewing

The hours for viewing most highly favoured fell into the 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. time period for all respondents for either the ETV or the Community Channel. Respondents generally favoured regular weekly but not daily programming, and as individuals (about half) were willing to take an active part in actual television production most often as a resource person.

production assistance

In the matter of production assistance, the school respondents looked first to their own in-house source, ACCESS second, followed by the cable company and the ETV consortia. Post-secondary respondents looked first to ACCESS for television production assistance, second to the individual organization, followed by the cable company and/or the ETV consortium. Surprisingly, the community also looked to the ETV consortium for production assistance with approximately the same frequency as they looked to the cable company or their own organization.

program interests

Program categories of greatest interest are: 1. Education (credit and non-credit), 2. Public Affairs, 3. Recreation, Health and Hobbies, 4. Dramatic Arts and Entertainment, 5. Sports and Organized Activities. Ranking last, out of thirty-five possible categories, were programs having to do with Family Counselling, Religion, and Domestic Arts and Homemaking. Respondents rank ordered the following possible (but not necessarily available) special applications of TV in order of importance: 1. Information Exchange; 2. Courses for Credit; 3. Shopping for Groceries; 4. Bill Paying and Banking; 5. Two-Way Meetings; 6. Pay T.V.

quality of programs

As to matters of interest and quality, educational television rates higher with respondents than does local commercial programming (broadcast TV) in matters of interest and the quality of production. The interest value but not the quality of production also rated higher for the cable Community Channel productions. At the same time viewers felt that the picture quality, as broadcast by the cable carrier (over either the ETV Channel or Community Channel) was inferior to that of the picture quality transmitted from and cable broadcast over the regular commercial channels.

There was no question in the minds of respondents as to whether or not Cable TV (Community and ETV) ought to be of the same calibre as local TV productions. They responded more than two to one in favour of equal quality.

separate channels

Also, most of the respondents agreed with the current policy of establishing two separate channels from which to broadcast ETV and community programming or were neutral about the matter. Finally, all groups expressed a high degree of interest in making direct use of the two designated channels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are based upon the premise that there is a sincere desire on the part of all concerned to foster community communications on both the designated Cable TV Channels (ETV and Community).

ACCESS

(1.) It is clear from the research that production assistance is expected from ACCESS primarily by schools and post-secondary institutions.

(2.) ACCESS ought to examine its penchant for Monday to Friday daytime programming in light of the survey evidence that there are population preferences for evening time viewing of ETV or community type telecasts and a marked preference for weekly rather than daily programming.

(3.) ACCESS could and should become an agent for change by assisting local groups in the utilization of the Cable TV (ETV and Community Channel) in ways other than merely providing re-broadcast programme materials.

Alberta Government and its Agencies

(1.) While the research evidence does not support the notion of direct government operation of community or educational cable TV channels, it is clear that its departments, agencies and corporations (namely the Department of Education, Department of Advanced Education

and Manpower, A.E.C.A. and ACCESS) are expected to assist in some real way. The information gathered through the two surveys, as well as the work done in connection with the Model Development, leaves little doubt that some assistance is expected by citizens in one form or another, from schools, post secondary institutes, consortia, and ACCESS.

Therefore, the Provincial Government, through its existing agencies and departments (as ascertained by A.E.C.A.) should offer assistance to community groups possibly by assisting in the setting up of "Community Citizen Council Components" within the existing Consortia as well as arranging for professional involvement from those community based groups having the expertise to accommodate and assist with such an organization.

(2.) It should also be prepared to negotiate with CRTTC for some change in the cabling regulations to accommodate the concept of a joint "ETV - Citizen Council" operating together but with separate interests and over different channels.

Cable Operators

Despite the particular endeavours concerning the Citizen ACCESS Channel which cable operators may have undertaken, there is little research evidence to the effect that the public is aware of them or has benefited greatly by them. Cable operators ought to be willing and able to provide better promotion of their Citizen ACCESS

capabilities as well as showing a more active interest in soliciting and assisting the various community groups to utilize these capabilities. The cable companies should also be willing to turn back some of their profits (which have been reported as being better than those of the open channel broadcasters) in the form of better quality signals and related production equipment, as well as creating production facilities having greater flexibility. Moreover, if the cable operators deem that their circumstance is such that little or no improvement can be made in these directions then it is suggested that the 10% of gross revenue (envisioned by CRTC as a fair contribution to community cable casting) simply be turned over to a broadened local cable TV Consortium and that the cable operators then become (this is current practice for the operation of commercial Cable TV Channels) merely the carriers of the signals and the supplier of head-end facilities as well as a provider of production space and technical facilities.

The Consortia

(1.) Those parts of the study showing audience viewing preferences, eg. Evening viewing time and weekly program expectations, ought to have some effect upon the programme practices of the Consortia. There are, too, areas of particular interest to viewers (as shown in various tables) which also relate directly to the viewing preferences of the local populations. It is also important to again note that courses offered for credit rank high in the programme expectations of the survey populations.

(2.) 'CRTC regulations notwithstanding, it would seem useful and fruitful if the ETV Consortium were to each have a citizen component so that a common local council could deal more effectively with the problems of access, production and programming over the two designated channels (ETV and Community).

CRTC

There is little evidence from this study to support the notion that Citizen ACCESS TV in Alberta nearly approaches the idea of Citizen Access Cable TV as envisioned by CRTC and its agents. While visionary in scope and commendable in principle, Citizen Access TV has not proven to have had any appreciable impact upon the "community" (in any of the definitions of the term as used by the Commission) nor is it likely to if simply left in the hands of cable companies who (in smaller centres particularly) are very often merely absentee owners of local operations concerned primarily with profits not citizen participation. If under the present set of conditions the fostering of community communications as a means of improving the quality of life through such endeavour is unlikely then CRTC ought to allow some change in the means by which these objectives might come about.

Moreover, CRTC ought to recognize that the community use of Cable TV will require something other than the present set of regulations and licensing requirements if there is ever to be an active citizenry making use of the cable systems as they now exist.

Post-Secondary Institutes and Schools

Post-Secondary Institutes, in particular, ought to be cognizant of the study evidence which deals with the expectations of citizens in the various communities. It is clear that leadership in the use of Cable ETV and Community Cable TV is expected partly from schools but more so from the post-secondary institutions. It is equally apparent that the surveyed populations expect televised courses for credit to come from the institutions. Although, there is no observable inverse proportion, it would seem that the institutional activity in these directions are in reverse to the needs expressed by the citizenry.